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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0720
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 001041

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: UN FERNANDEZ-TARANCO BRIEFS USUN REGARDING RECENT
VISIT TO BAGHDAD

REF: BAGHDAD 02929

11. (C) SUMMARY: On November 11, Ambassador DiCarlo met with UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, following his recent return from Baghdad. Fernandez-Taranco reported that Iraqi officials have accepted that Taranco's mission was not an investigation; however, they continue to seek repeat visits which they see as a deterrent to further possible incidents. Fernandez-Taranco said that GOI officials presented a coordinated story line and level of sophistication that the UN does not often see in such Iraqi efforts. PM Maliki explicitly named Syria as being behind the bombings, although he did not blame the government directly. While Fernandez-Taranco did not hear a direct link between AQI and Baathist activity in Syria, GOI officials repeatedly told him that the August and October bombings "could not have occurred without funding and assistance from Baathist elements in Syria." At no time did Iraqi officials discuss GOI decisions to remove protective barriers or the possible role of GOI complicity - either purposeful or otherwise - showing Fernandez-Taranco little evidence of any serious internal-focus to the on-going GOI investigation. While Fernandez-Taranco feels he cannot return to Baghdad with the same limited mandate, he is paradoxically concerned that the "illusions of what the UN is doing, but is not doing, could crumble if additional bombings occur." End summary.

12. (C) On November 11, Ambassador DiCarlo met with UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, following his recent return from Baghdad. He characterized his job upon return as "managing expectations" and noted the strong interest of many Council members and other parties who had requested bilateral briefings immediately upon his return. His report to the SYG is not yet final and provided no timeline for completion. While Fernandez-Taranco expressed his hope that once the report is sent to the SYG that "this matter ends there," his questions to the Ambassador about possible next steps in the Council and his expectations for the conversation with the Iraqi PermRep - who was waiting to meet Fernandez-Taranco following our meeting - underscored his expectation that this matter will neither end quickly nor quietly.

13. (C) In his meetings with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Justice and Defense Ministers and the special commission (headed by FM Zebari) investigating the attacks, Fernandez-Taranco felt all were still in a state of shock, with the core of the government "completely rattled." He heard over and over again that this was "not just any attack, but a symbolic and real attempt at regime change."

14. (SBU) GOI officials appeared to have reluctantly accepted that Fernandez-Taranco's mission was not an investigation.

Taranco reported he neither accepted documentation nor asked investigative questions as a way to underscore his limited mission. While satisfied with the visit, GOI officials told Fernandez-Taranco they wish to see a continuing process since they see UN involvement as a deterrent to further incidents, showing that the UN and the world are watching. PM Maliki rejected Fernandez-Taranco's offer of UN help though the UN counterterrorism division (CTED), stating that Iraq receives enough CT assistance from the USG and other international partners; however, the National Security Minister and other Iraqi officials expressed interest in receiving support and further capacity building from CTED.

¶5. (C) Fernandez-Taranco was impressed with the "coordinated story line" he heard from Iraqi officials. While he did not hear a direct link between AQI and Baathist activity in Syria, and noted that GOI officials are still grappling with whether Syria is directly involved or is rather knowingly enabling and hosting terrorists, GOI officials told Taranco that the August and October bombings "could not have occurred without funding and assistance from Baathist elements in Syria." Fernandez-Taranco was also impressed with the level of legal sophistication from the Iraqis, as they pointed to UNSCR 1483, UNSCR 1618, and Lockerbie as precedents for possible ways of continuing UN involvement. (Note: 1483 set up a number of Chapter VII mandates, including DFI, the UNAMI SRSG, and the Tarasov mandate; 1618 is not a Chapter VII resolution but condemns terrorism and was passed following the bombing of the Iraqi Electoral Commission in 2005. With regard to Lockerbie, GOI officials were likely referring to the investigation and international tribunal that was set up

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in the Hague. End note.) Fernandez-Taranco also noted that while GOI officials blamed Syria for the bombings frequently and loudly in private meetings, they were careful not to name Syria when talking with the press during his trip, and Fernandez-Taranco believed it was clear that the Iraqis did not want to draw Syria into a "conflict situation, but did not think they were not getting the kind of cooperation from Syria that they needed." At no time did Iraqi officials discuss GOI decisions to remove protective barriers or the possible role of GOI complicity - either purposeful or otherwise - showing Fernandez-Taranco little evidence of any serious internal-focus to the on-going GOI investigation.

¶6. (SBU) Fernandez-Taranco mentioned his meetings with Ambassador Hill and General Odierno, saying that Hill requested continuing UN trips for their deterrence value given the major anxiety of possible future bombings. Fernandez-Taranco found Odierno's briefing to be thoughtful and analytical, calling it the "best information received on the ground."

¶7. (C) Fernandez-Taranco summed up Iraqi views as 1) they want this to be a continuing UN process; 2) they see the UN involvement as a deterrent to further attacks (Comment: how real that deterrent value might be is questionable. End comment.); and 3) fears about the likelihood of further attacks. While understanding the GOI hope for a continuation of visits, Fernandez-Taranco believes he cannot return with the same mandate. Paradoxically he is concerned that the "illusions of what the UN is doing, but is not doing, could crumble if additional bombings occur." And, any possibility of bilateral or trilateral work seems distinctly unlikely since PM Maliki told Taranco that the Turkish-led negotiations between Iraq and Syria were "dead" and "impossible to revive."

Wolff